

## LOCAL RESOURCES

Your medical examiner's office may be able to provide information on local funeral homes.

■ **YOUR LOCAL RESOURCE HERE**  
800.xxx.xxxx | xxxxxx@gmail.com  
www.xxxxxxxxxxxxxx.org

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**Grief** is a natural process of emotions that occurs when someone dies. A bereaved person can integrate grief into their normal routines, but the time it takes can vary for each person. Complicated grief can occur when initial grief emotions continue and significantly impact one's functioning for a period of time six months or longer.

**Trauma** can also be a component of grief when someone, especially a child, dies suddenly and unexpectedly. This can leave survivors feeling helpless, vulnerable and sometimes powerless. Trauma symptoms typically last anywhere from a few days to a few months, gradually fading as the emotional trauma is processed.

Most individuals will experience natural recovery. Be gentle with yourself and reach out for support if and when you need it. Ask your medical provider for a referral to mental health services if you would like professional support.

## NATIONAL RESOURCES

■ **THE SUDC FOUNDATION**  
800.620.SUDC (7832) | [www.sudc.org](http://www.sudc.org)

The SUDC Foundation is the only organization worldwide whose purpose is to promote awareness, advocate for research, and support those affected by SUDC. SUDC is the fifth leading category of death in children ages one to four years. The SUDC Foundation provides all services at no cost to families.

■ **THE COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS**  
877.969.0010 | [www.compassionatefriends.org](http://www.compassionatefriends.org)

A self-help organization offering friendship, understanding, and hope to bereaved families that have experienced the death of a child. Locate a local chapter through website.

■ **FIRST CANDLE**  
800.221.7437 | [www.firstcandle.org](http://www.firstcandle.org)

Dedicated to reducing the rates of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS), Sudden Unexpected Infant Death and preventable Stillbirths by educating caregivers and families, and supporting research. Offers online bereavement support for grieving families of stillbirth and infant death.

■ **NATIONAL CENTER FOR VICTIMS OF CRIME**  
800.FYI.CALL | [www.ncvc.org](http://www.ncvc.org)

Provides crime victims with information, resources and referrals to existing victim assistance groups. Comprehensive services for crime victims.

■ **NATIONAL SUICIDE PREVENTION HOTLINE**  
800.273.8255 (Hotline)

Provides 24/7, free and confidential support for people in distress, prevention and crisis resources for you or your loved ones, and best practices for professionals.

■ **Book recommendations** for grieving families can be found at [www.sudc.org/education-resources/grief-resources](http://www.sudc.org/education-resources/grief-resources)



# HELP for FAMILIES

when an infant or young child dies in  
**Your County/State**  
**name goes here**

**YOU ARE NOT ALONE.**  
Information, support and  
guidance are available.

Created in partnership with THE SUDC FOUNDATION  
800.620.SUDC(7832) | [WWW.SUDC.ORG](http://WWW.SUDC.ORG)



# THERE IS NO GREATER LOSS THAN THE DEATH OF YOUR CHILD.

When a baby or child dies suddenly, a team of professionals investigate their death. Emergency medical personnel, law enforcement, medicolegal investigators and medical examiners are just a few of the professionals who may be involved on this first day. It may be difficult to understand what is happening during this overwhelming tragedy.

This brochure will provide you with a framework of what to expect in the days, weeks and months ahead, as well as provide you with resources on where you can go for help.

## Medicolegal death investigation authorities involved may be:

### ■ Medicolegal death investigator

On the day of your child’s death, you may have met a medicolegal death investigator. This individual collects information to assist the medical examiner. They investigate the scene where your child lived and died and interview the parents and caregivers to gain a better understanding of the child’s life and the events leading up to the time of their death. The medicolegal death investigator is generally not a police officer, but usually works in the medical examiner office.

### ■ Medical examiner

The role of the medical examiner is to determine the exact cause of your child’s death and why it occurred. To do this, they evaluate the information gathered by the medicolegal death investigator and perform an autopsy and additional testing. The medical examiner is a medical doctor, often with a specialty in forensic pathology. They are especially trained to evaluate the cause of death and if a crime has been committed. A pathologist is a doctor specially trained to study the cause and effects of diseases.

#### Additional agencies involved:

Members of law enforcement are often some of the first responders in the instance of a sudden death. Family services or another child protective service agency may evaluate the safety of other children in the environment as governed by local policy. All agencies will perform their own independent investigation in parallel with the medical examiner.

## WHAT HAPPENS NOW



Your child will be cared for respectfully and transported to the medical examiner office for the autopsy. The autopsy is an external and internal examination of a body. Licensed physicians, specifically forensic pathologists acting as medical examiners, will perform forensic autopsies to determine cause of death. After examination, the body is closed. Specimens of body fluids and tissues are retained for diagnostic testing.

When necessary, an organ, such as the brain and/or heart, may also be retained for further testing. None of these tests will prevent the body from being released to the family for funeral arrangements.

Once the medical examiner completes the autopsy, the office will contact the funeral home of your choice. Your child will be released and the process of a funeral can begin.

The medical examiner’s office may contact you soon after the autopsy is performed to share information with you or request additional information. The medical examiner may also explain that more tests need to be performed to understand why your child died. Under this circumstance, the initial cause of death on your child’s death certificate may read “pending further investigation.” This will be amended when further testing and the investigation are complete. Further tests will include examining small tissue samples collected during the autopsy under a microscope. The health or disease of an organ can be evaluated in this way. The medical examiner may pursue other testing as needed to assist in determining your child’s cause and manner of death.

It is important that the medical examiner/pathologist perform a thorough evaluation of your child to understand their death. The full investigation will take several weeks, and often a few months, before the final assessment is complete. At that time, the final autopsy report is available.

### ■ Autopsy report conclusions

The report will list a “cause of death” and a “manner of death.” The medical examiner determines both. The “cause of death” is found by autopsy; an infection, cancer or injury that is responsible for the death. To describe the “manner of death,” or how the death occurred, the medical examiner has five coding options: natural, homicide, suicide, accidental and undetermined. “Undetermined” manner may be used when environmental and autopsy findings cannot clearly distinguish the manner of death.

## IMPORTANT CONTACT INFORMATION

Your medical examiner’s name:

Your medical examiner’s office phone number:  
**your phone number here**

Your child’s medical examiner case number:

Your point of contact for medical examiner office updates:

Your medicolegal investigator’s name:

Other agency contacts:

Your point of contact at the medical examiner’s office will be able to tell you how and when to anticipate case updates and the final cause of death opinion.

## To obtain a copy of the final autopsy report:

- Call your point of contact at the medical examiner’s office at the phone number listed above.
- When you call, provide your child’s name and medical examiner case number (listed above), and confirm that you are his/her legal next of kin.
- Specific instructions will be provided to you including how to receive a copy of the autopsy report when it is ready. You may need to submit this request in writing.
- *There may be costs associated.*

Reading the autopsy report can be an overwhelming experience. Before doing so, discuss the report findings with your medical examiner. When you receive the report, it may be most helpful for you to read it with your child’s pediatrician or family doctor, who can assist you with medical terminology you may not be familiar with, explain the significance of the findings and discuss any potential medical screening recommended for your family as a result of your child’s death. If you still have questions, contact your medical examiner for further clarification.